



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MICHAEL F. EASLEY
GOVERNOR

LYNDO TIPPETT
SECRETARY

**North Carolina Board of Transportation
Environmental Planning and Policy Committee
Meeting Minutes for June 5, 2002**

A meeting of the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee (EPPC) was held on June 5, 2002 at 8:00 AM in the Board Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building. Nina Szlosberg chaired the meeting. Other Board of Transportation members that attended were:

Conrad Burrell	Frank Johnson
Marion Cowell	Cam McRae
Nancy Dunn	Nina Szlosberg
Doug Galyon	Alan Thornburg
Clark Jenkins	Lanny Wilson

Other attendees included:

Rob Ayers	Pat Ivey	Sandy Nance
Christie Barbee	Berry Jenkins	Ken Pace
Eddie Dancausse	David King	Benton Payne
Betsy Davis	Don Lee	Allen Pope
Craig Deal	Sharon Lipscomb	Lubin Prevatt
Janet D'Ignazio	Dan Martin	Bill Rosser
Lisa Glover	Carl McCann	Larry Sams
Rob Hanson	Ehren Meister	Charles Tomlinson
Len Hill	Ashley Memory	Jim Trogden
Mike Holder	Tancred Miller	Hawley Truax
Sheila Holman	Mike Mills	Steve Wall
Julie Hunkins	Jon Nance	Ron Watson
David Hyder		

Ms. Szlosberg called the meeting to order. After opening remarks, Ms. Szlosberg accepted a motion to approve the minutes as presented from the May 1, 2002 EPPC meeting. The motion was approved.

Ms Szlosberg introduced Mr. Hawley Truax, Senior Policy Analyst for the Office of the Governor, to discuss the Governor's Agenda for Air Quality. Mr. Truax opened by stating his role in the Governor's Office and reiterating that he is available to the board members and public outside of the committee meeting and would entertain any comments or thoughts on environmental or related issues.

Mr. Truax began his remarks by commenting on some of the “big picture” air quality issues on the Governor’s agenda. The Governor’s overriding concern is that of the public health and he feels strongly that clean air can be a legacy established for future generations. The Governor has clearly stated his concern for clean air at the recent Clean Air Summit. The statement, “it’s cheaper to clean the air than to clean the lung” is a poignant example of the importance of air quality. Further, the Governor’s Office views clean air as an economic imperative to North Carolina. Air quality is part of our quality of life, which can act as an incentive to bring business and economic development into areas within the state, especially in the mountains. Currently, the Governor’s Office is focused on the Clean Smokestacks Bill, introduced in the legislature, and achieving significant controls on the fourteen coal-fired power plants in the state. The gains will be remarkable. The gains will be a 50% reduction in SO₂ and a 20% reduction in NOS within the state.

The next “big picture” air quality objective of the Governor’s Office is to address transportation issues. Previously the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the NC Department of Transportation (DOT) worked closely to pass a bill on the inspections and maintenance of automobiles that will have long-term significant effects on smog reductions. Mr. Truax stated that our state has been a national leader in pushing for lower sulfur fuel in calibrated cars, which allows for them to operate much more efficiently. DOT has also been a leader in converting its motor fleet to use alternative fuel. Using alternative fuel is key to improving air quality. National trends indicate there is not one air quality initiative that can independently impact air quality. However, there are numerous little things that can be undertaken incrementally. He points out that forming the environmental committee on the Transportation Board is a big first step. It will allow for a group with transportation expertise and environmental concerns to form coherent and appropriate policy.

The Governor’s Office also acknowledges that air quality is a regional concern and the Governor is taking an aggressive approach by attending summits and forums to discuss North Carolina’s issues and achievements. The information conveyed at these forums and summits serves as positive launching pads for strategies to achieve environmental goals and to bring together individuals with environmental, transportation and energy expertise. Mr. Truax opened the floor to questions.

Mr. Galyon asked a question concerning regional air quality. He asked whether the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and their coal-fired power plants really have a negative impact on North Carolina’s air quality and whether this is an accurate statement. Mr. Truax stated that this was a very accurate statement, especially in our western mountains and the Southern Appalachian Mountains. However, he noted that there are some efforts underway to address some of the significant air pollution drifting from other regions and states into our state and mountains, such as the Southern Appalachian Mountain Initiative (SAMI). Some agencies and groups are also working with other neighboring regions and states within the Ohio Valley to implement laws regulating coal-fired power plants and air quality. Mr. Truax and Sheila Holman with DENR – Division of Air Quality, clarified that TVA is a Quasi-Federal agency. Ms. Holman stated that the best way to effect regulatory control and improve air quality, due to air pollution drifting over state lines, is through the Federal government. Currently, an air quality initiative similar to the General Assembly’s Smokestacks Bill is a federal congressional bill known as the Clear Skies Initiative. In closing, Ms. Holman noted that improving air quality and cleaning up power plants must be a joint effort by everyone including North Carolina, Federal agencies, and states throughout the Ohio valley.

Ms. Szlosberg briefly noted that she and many other representatives have been participating in an Air Quality Roundtable designed to discuss and make recommendations for improving air quality within the state. She

introduced three participants of the Air Quality Roundtable that were in attendance including, Sheila Holman, DENR – Division of Air Quality, David Hyder, NCDOT – Office of the Human Environment, and Eddie Dancausse, Federal Highway Administration.

Ms. Szlosberg introduced the next presentation. The presentation was a video recording of a session at the Air Quality Summit that sums up the importance of air quality and public health. The speaker was Dr. Clay Ballentine, a private practice physician in Asheville who has studied extensively about the importance of air quality and its effect on the public. He participates in numerous air quality organizations and has written several papers on the effects of air pollution. It was noted that a copy of the presentation slides and data were included as handouts distributed prior to the meeting.

Dr. Ballentine opened his presentation by stating the importance of air quality in relation to public health. He noted that this topic is so diverse and important that it is difficult to talk about all of the key issues and ramifications in his presentation. Air pollution plays a role in all three major killers: cancer, cardiovascular disease, and lung disease. Most importantly, the health community is losing the battle fighting lung disease due to the effects of air pollution. Cancer rates and cardiovascular disease have actually decreased from the effects of air pollution. He notes that there is overwhelming evidence in the medical community that air pollution effects the public's health tremendously, and he asked elected and appointed leaders to act now to make an effort to improve our air quality for future generations.

There are four main pollutants: ozone, particulates, air-borne toxics, and mercury. Dr. Ballentine noted that he was going to concentrate primarily on the negative impacts of ozone and particulates. There are several types of people at risk for these pollutants. Most notably are those individuals that are otherwise healthy adults and children. The range of these health problems literally runs from the cradle to the grave. He points out the "pyramid of effects" from poor air quality. Deaths and hospital admissions are at the top of the pyramid, and at the widest point of the pyramid are the common ailments such as asthma and lung function changes. A person's "normal" lung function improves until the age of twenty and then begins to slowly deteriorate with age. When a person is subjected to poor air quality and pollution, the normal lung deterioration is increased and the lung function will decline more rapidly.

Ozone is an extremely caustic gas. It does to your lung lining what sunburn does to your skin. Ozone has a variety of effects, including causing or worsening asthma and other respiratory infections. Asthma is the "eight hundred pound gorilla" for health concerns in children. It's the number one cause for hospitalization of children, the number one cause for lost school days, and the number one health care cost of childhood diseases. And the numbers for asthma related illnesses are steadily increasing for children and all other ages. Asthma due to air pollution is a serious problem effecting all people. A recent study explained that children who spend more time outside have more asthma and, therefore, have more asthmatic attacks and doctor visits. Further, Dr. Ballentine explains that asthma accounted for \$15 million of health care costs in North Carolina's seventh and eighth graders alone last year. If prescription costs are factored in, the lost wages from parents missing work, other medical visit expenses, and other children age groups, the total costs top \$100 million per year in North Carolina that we pay for pediatric asthma. Emphysema is also another health problem occurring and increasing with air pollution. The increase in death rates because of ozone exposure is also on the rise. In North Carolina, most of the large urban areas have made the American Lung Associations most ozone and air polluted cities in the nation for consecutive years. So air pollution continues to be a problem for us locally.

Particulate pollution evolving from power plants is another very serious air pollutant. North Carolina is in a red zone region for high particulate levels. Particulates (PM 2.5) cause a variety of illnesses by penetrating deep into the lungs. Other serious effects include negatively stimulating the immune system, increasing the potential for blood clotting in arteries, and decreasing heart rate responses leading to sudden cardiac failure or death. Cardiac deaths are the leading cause for death in our nation. Dr. Ballentine also elaborated that it is not just heart attacks to be concerned about, but lung cancer as well. Lung cancer death rates also increase with more exposure to particulates. The long-term effects of particulate pollution exposure cause up to four percent of all U.S. deaths. He explained that living in an air-polluted area is like living with a smoker. There is also no safe place. There is lack of a threshold effect. However, the EPA has given the level of fifteen as the threshold level for air pollution. Most of the North Carolina cities fall in the moderate level, slightly above the recommended level of fifteen. Approximately thirty-three billion people in the southeast region are living in significant air pollution, leading to \$20 billion of annual health care costs. North Carolina ranks fourth in the nation for power plant particulate-related death rates. The negative results of particulates and overall air pollution effect otherwise healthy people and children; this can be observed in study after study. There have been “clean up” methods previously used that have improved air quality and potentially shifted associated costs.

In closing, Dr. Ballentine explained the risks involved. If someone were to smoke a cigarette, they are assuming a risk. However, air pollution is an imposed health risk on an individual. It is up to us to make a change and encourage the clean up of the air we breathe through enacting adequate regulation at the local, state, and federal levels. He encouraged everyone to learn more about air pollution through the American Lung Association web site.

Following Dr. Ballentine’s Presentation, Ms. Szlosberg elaborated that three North Carolina cities were recently identified in a report published by the American Lung Association identifying the nation’s twenty-five worst air quality cities. In addition, more than thirty North Carolina counties received a failing grade based on poor ozone quality. Within those counties, there is a population of approximately four million. Of the four million, approximately 1.7 million are considered “high risk” categories, such as the elderly, asthmatics and children.

Ms. Szlosberg introduced David Hyder, Office of the Human Environment, NCDOT, to outline the transportation recommendations identified at the third annual Air Quality Summit. Mr. Hyder began by stating that the four governors attending the summit agreed to jointly work together to improve air quality across the southeast and to direct three working groups to make recommendations for improving air quality in their respective categories. The three working groups are: a transportation working group, an energy working group, and a multi-pollutant working group.

The transportation group focused primarily on policy issues that could improve air quality. The transportation working group came up with three areas for emphasis. The first is the potential use of alternative fuels. The group is discussing early introduction of low sulfur fuels and the use of cleaner diesel and gasoline. They also are discussing an annual conference among the states to assess the use of alternative fuels and how to implement such practices and to bring all the significant players to the table.

The second recommendation the transportation group focused on was heavy-duty diesel engines and how to regulate them more efficiently. Diesel engines have a history of poor regulation and environmental standards, and

the group is suggesting possible improvement ideas, such as retro-fitting diesel powered vehicles or completely re-powering the vehicle by replacing the diesel engine with a natural gas engine or equivalent device.

The third recommendation was based on surface transportation. There is concern about the high number of automobiles traveling through the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. There was discussion about potentially limiting the number of cars entering the park daily. Mr. Hyder notes that the park has two significant distinctions. Its one of the most visited national parks in the United States and it has the poorest air quality of any other national park. Currently, the park and its region have two challenges. The first is how to regulate the number of single occupant vehicles from traveling through the park and second, how to circulate the tourists in the region. One of the proposals from this recommendation is to allocate federal funding to conduct a study for an integrated transportation system in the Great Smoky National Park and the three-state area of Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. A component of this proposal would include a regional surface transportation alternative such as a high-speed rail system throughout the southeast and this region.

In Mr. Hyder's closing comments he notes that a key message from the summit is that the burden to greatly improve the air quality lies with the transportation industry. The messages relayed by the Governor and other speakers attending the summit were that basically it's now time to turn our attention over to transportation issues and look at innovative solutions and the relationship of transportation and land use planning to air quality issues.

Following the presentation, Ms. Szlosberg opened up the meeting for discussion and asked the board members to add any suggestions or next steps concerning air quality.

Board Member Conrad Burrell indicated his growing concern for the air pollution in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Mr. Burrell commented on his interest in how the park system plans to regulate vehicles traveling through the park. He also has a concern for something to be done in the Ohio Valley to improve the air pollution drifting into the mountains, and he believes the pollution may begin to effect our tourist industry.

Ms. Szlosberg reiterated the Air Quality Summit report recommendation for a mass transit system, whether busing or rail, throughout the park. Mr. Hyder elaborated on the recommendation as a potential to license bus operators and the possibility for transferable bus passes for a park busing system that will be usable in other regional cities, such as a system-wide bus pass. The goal of this idea is not to completely stop vehicle use in the park but to provide a mechanism to limit automobile use and reduce the dependence of personal vehicles while visiting. Ms. Szlosberg mentioned the previous discussions about land use planning and transportation systems/thoroughfare planning. Janet D'Ignazio, Chief Environmental Officer, NCDOT, clarified the legislation adopted by the General Assembly concerning local land use planning. There were two fundamental objectives of this law. The first was that local governments are required to adopt a land development plan or be in the process of developing the plan to receive DOT assistance. The second is that the plans are no longer just thoroughfare plans but system-wide plans including all modes of transportation such as pedestrian and bicycling components.

Board Member Larry Helms asked how a land development plan is defined. Ms. D'Ignazio responded that the term "land development plan" has been a concern since it is not well-defined and that this issue will be coming before the EPPC soon to review what is being proposed. Basically, the information DOT needs to know from the plans is (1) where the community plans to grow and (2) what kind of growth will it be, such as industrial or residential. The need for local communities to develop land development plans is an emerging issue that will need

to be addressed in the near future. There are a handful of smaller communities in the state that have not developed these plans and it will begin to effect DOT's transportation planning. Ms. Szlosberg commented that in no way is the DOT attempting to regulate how communities control their land use or how they grow. Mr. Helms elaborated on his question by mentioning how some agencies attempt to alter land use in communities by permit issuance or rejection.

Board Member Clark Jenkins asked a question concerning the use of ethanol as an alternative fuel and whether it causes environmental problems. Ms. Holman addressed the question and mentioned that several articles and presentations have recently been made on this topic. She stated that there are two issues surrounding the use of ethanol. The first is that it produces 85% more ozone when compared to a traditional gasoline powered automobile. The second issue involves its toxicity. There is a toxic pollutant that evolves from the use of ethanol and becomes a very big concern associated with its possible use in a large facility in an urban area. There are issues around ethanol but there is also not yet enough information on its environmental concerns to make a definitive decision.

Board Member Nancy Dunn commented that the issue of air quality is so diverse and important that the committee should recommend that DOT staff members come up with three to five priorities and key initiatives that the Board could really concentrate on and recommend to leadership and to the legislature.

Ms. Szlosberg agreed that this was the most feasible way to follow up with the importance of air quality and to make some key recommendations. She also commented on her exploration of alternative fuel use and possible future presentations in conjunction with David Hyder and the Division of Air Quality on implementing its use in North Carolina's motor fleets. She reiterated the recommendation for the staff to develop some air quality priorities and that it would be great to possibly touch on this subject at every committee meeting.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made and properly seconded. The meeting adjourned at 9:04 AM.

The next meeting for the Environmental Planning and Policy Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, July 10, 2002 at 8:00 AM in the Board Room (Room 150) of the Transportation Building.

NS/jh/em